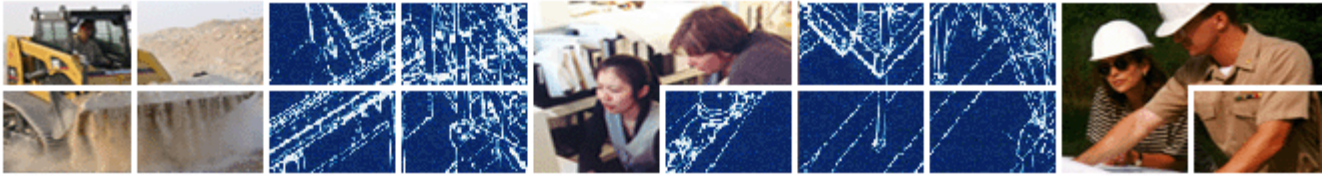


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Training the work force at U.S. military installations, bases and ports to respond to WMD attacks enhances overall safety

WMD PREPAREDNESS

By Jennifer Gaskill

While the threat to any single military installation may be minimal, the threat to all installations, bases and ports in the United States and internationally, is of major concern. Of all asymmetric threats that could be levied against a military force, terrorist incidents involving a weapon of mass destruction (WMD) are the most serious. Depending on the WMD agent used and the method of dissemination, hundreds to thousands of lives could be lost.

Since 1997, the United States has taken a proactive approach to developing and implementing a nationwide domestic preparedness plan. That program is about to expand to include all personnel at military installations because they likely would be on their own for the first few critical hours after a WMD incident.

Domestic Preparedness Program

The U.S. domestic preparedness plan has its roots in the passage of the 1997 Nunn-Lugar-Domenici bill that funded enhancements to the capabilities of emergency responders in incidents involving nuclear, biological and chemical terrorism. To accomplish that mission, the U.S. Army turned to the core of its non-medical chemical and biological expertise at the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center (ECBC) to design, test and implement a nationwide program.

ECBC was the logical choice to lead the initiative because its background in protection, detection and decontamination from chemical and biological weapons dates to World War I, when chlorine gas first was used as a chemical warfare agent.

In recent years, ECBC has again risen to the forefront of the chemical and biological fight, responding to the terrorist use of anthrax and supporting war fighters around the world. ECBC leveraged the lessons learned in the earlier program to design and implement a comprehensive WMD First Responders Preparedness Program that included planning, training, exercises and technical assistance.



Participants engage in a chemical field training exercise to test all aspects of the installation's WMD response plan.

Moving Beyond Traditional First Responders

More recently, ECBC has expanded the program to prepare the work force at U.S. military installations, bases and ports to respond to asymmetric attacks involving WMD, and to mitigate the impact of such an attack on the continuity of operations.

ECBC experts have worked with installations and agencies worldwide in implementing the WMD First Responders Preparedness Program on a broader scale and gained perspective on readiness for a WMD incident.

Important considerations in the expansion of the program included:

- the need for a proactive point of contact with enough clout to build critical mass to encourage attendance of the training;

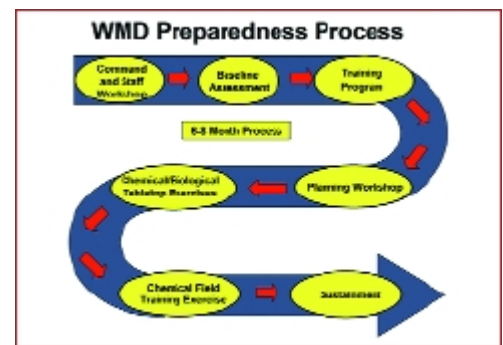
- the need for civilian responders and installation managers to conduct annual training to offset staff turnover impacts;
- the need for basic Hazmat training and Incident Command System training; and
- the benefits of distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) to each first responder, rather than storing PPE in bulk at one central location.

Teaching Preparedness

At an installation, the WMD First Responders Preparedness Program is conducted with small, highly skilled teams of emergency responders and WMD experts. This on-site approach promotes synergy and cohesiveness among the participating military and civilian responders. By conducting the program on-site, the entire installation emergency response system has the opportunity to participate alongside local, state or territory, federal and host nation mutual aid agencies, making this integrated approach very cost effective. The program can be delivered in its entirety, or in a modular fashion, depending on the installation's unique requirements, time constraints and available funding.

Initiation Workshop. The process begins with a command and staff workshop that is designed to familiarize installation command staff with the goals and capabilities of the WMD program. It provides an overview of the program and fosters an awareness of the implications of a WMD incident on the installation and the effect on its mission.

Baseline Assessment. The second step is to conduct a baseline assessment of the installation's current state of preparedness for responding to a WMD incident. The baseline assessment is accomplished with a facilitated tabletop exercise using a chemical agent scenario. The baseline offers the installation an opportunity to determine what basic strengths and weaknesses exist within its emergency response system for dealing with a WMD incident. It also provides a built-in mechanism for measuring improvement throughout the process and a focus for future preparedness efforts that allows ECBC and installation personnel to jointly develop a strategy for enhancing preparedness. The baseline assessment also should include review of any existing disaster preparedness plans and standard operating procedures, as well as any previous vulnerability assessments.



Training Program. The training program, the third step, gives first responders a solid foundation of the unique considerations involved in responding to a WMD incident. ECBC implements six responder training courses along with an employee awareness video that can be used to train non-responder audiences, including dependents and installation support personnel.

Planning Workshop. The next step is to conduct a planning workshop, which involves both review and refinement of existing installation response plans and annexes by ECBC experts, or joint development of response plans and annexes if they do not exist. The planning stage is critical in defining the roles and responsibilities of each entity involved in an installation emergency response and for conducting a comprehensive inventory of existing response assets and capabilities.

Tabletop Exercises. Once a plan or draft plan is in place, the next step involves conducting tabletop exercises to validate the plan and reinforce the training. Tabletop exercises focus on the command, control and communication aspects of the response, and how various response functions assimilate into a total integrated response system. The tabletop exercises assist first responders and mutual aid partners in gaining a comprehensive understanding of an emergency response to a WMD incident and their role in that response. They also assist in focusing objectives for the field training exercise.

The technical assistance component complements the planning, training and exercise modules in the WMD preparedness process by filling in any technical voids that exist. Technical assistance is geared towards the level of effort required by each installation and ranges from vulnerability assessments of certain facilities to equipment consultations. This component of the program can be conducted at any time during the process.

Field Training Exercise. Finally, a chemical field training exercise is conducted to test all aspects of the installation's WMD response plan to the maximum extent possible. The functional exercise is tailored to meet the specific objectives of the installation emergency response preparedness program. It provides a practical means to assess the plan's ability to be executed in an effective and timely manner, and insight into required changes to the plan, as well as areas of the response capability requiring additional work.

Sustainment. ECBC also conducts train-the-trainer courses and leaves behind all training, exercise and planning materials on compact discs; thereby enabling the installation to become proficient and self-sufficient in responding to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. The materials may be used as part of the installation's annual meeting.

Conclusion

The asymmetric nature of terrorism has made it necessary for first responders to be as prepared for a WMD disaster as the war fighter. Military installations and their surrounding communities have emerged as areas where WMD response training and coordination planning are especially important. To date, more than 40,000 individuals at federal installations in the United States and overseas have received this important training.

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